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SUBJECT: FATA STUDENTS "EXPERIENCE AMERICA"

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On March 10, Principal Officer, US Consulate in Peshawar, USAID Deputy Director for the FATA Development Program and USAID OTI representative met with 15 recent returnees from the Experience America Program (EAP). This USAID multi-year student exchange program is designed to improve understanding of America and its values with FATA youth while educating Americans on the FATA. Twenty-two students participated in the pilot phase. Based on an interview with some of the returnees, Embassy believes our expectations were more than achieved and plans to send an additional 130 students this summer, with a goal of 500 over the next five years. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On March 10, Principal Officer, US Consulate in Peshawar, USAID Deputy Director for the FATA Development Program and USAID OTI representative met with 15 recent returnees from pilot Experience America Program (EAP), an exchange program funded under the USAID FATA Livelihoods Development Program (LDP) and supported by the Peshawar Public Affairs section. The EAP is administered by The Academy for Educational Development (AED), one of two USAID lead implementing partners for the LDP. This organization has extensive experience in running such programs. EAP's objective is to bridge the cultural gap between the FATA and the United States by providing an opportunity to the youth of the tribal areas to have a firsthand experience of America while simultaneously providing an opportunity for Americans to interact with the tribal students and learn about the Pashtun tribal culture, traditions and norms. Over the next five years USAID, through AED, expects to send 500 students to the US. USAID is preparing to send an additional 130 students to the U.S. this summer. This effort represents a cooperative effort between USAID and Public Affairs that the consulate plans to continue.

¶3. (SBU) Twenty-two students participated in the pilot phase of the program. All returned. They represented most Agencies and Frontier Regions. Three women took part in the program. The program consisted of a structured two month program, undertaken from January to March. The program included a week in Washington, D.C, where the participants received orientation, including a visit to USAID, and meetings with Assistant Secretary of State, Richard Boucher, and Congressional staff. Participants then moved to one of two universities - Kansas State University and California State University at Chico. At these universities, the students participated in specially designed programs in such topics as watershed management, irrigation, business and agricultural extension. All were provided accelerated English language study. All had access to religious facilities at the universities and the adjoining areas. Most importantly they all became part of the respective student body at each university. The group from Kansas State was particularly enthusiastic and called themselves "wildcats" after the KSU basketball team. The third part of the program

included an extensive stay with an American family.

¶4. (SBU) All returnees spoke highly of the program. The participants spoke freely and positively of their experience. There were no serious cultural issues. In the pre-departure meetings, many worried about potential crime and racial issues while in the states. These fears appear to have been allayed during the visit. The returnees were struck with how Americans cooperate, their sense of social responsibility through community volunteer activities and individual responsibility for actions. All spoke highly of the home stays. One participant, who was hospitalized during the trip, was touched when his home stay sponsor stayed with him for two days while he was in the hospital. All commented on the openness and kindness of the families with whom they stayed. AED is now working with the returnees to develop a post trip program. They have already provided the returnees with an encrypted web-site in order to stay connected and will develop programs with the returnees that will add to the experience. Several of the returnees will provide mentoring services for future participants and have offered to be on selection committees. They were all supportive of the idea that this remain a program between the U.S. Embassy and the students of the FATA.

¶5. (SBU) Embassy believes the program has more than met our objectives. These students were bright and articulate, and many of them will be political, community and business leaders in the future. It is obvious the Experience America Program touched them and added a better understanding of what America is and its beliefs. This was done through interacting with ordinary Americans and seeing what Pashtuns from the FATA have in common with Americans.

¶6. (SBU) The Experience America Program is one of several programs which USAID is implementing under LDP to reach the youth of the FATA. USAID is also partnering with the Public Affairs Section to

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establish a Lincoln Corner at Gomel University in DI Khan. USAID implementing partner Cooperative Housing Foundation constructed and equipped the Lincoln Corner and PAS is providing material support for the program. We expect the program to be operational shortly. USAID is also supporting literacy programs, skills development and vocational training and sports programs throughout the FATA to engage youth and provide options outside of militancy. These programs are in their infancy, but we expect to see encouraging results as programs are rolled out and additional youth participate over the next few years.

PATTERSON